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ESL学生のための報道記事前文の分析

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Only the News that Fits: Breaking Down News Article Leads into Manageable Parts for EFL Students

SCHULMAN Michael*

“Hard news” and “soft news” describe the two main types of news articles. Soft news is comprised of human interest, entertainment, and longer informational pieces. For example, a profile of a famous person, or an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Japan and Russia, would be classified as soft news. Hard news includes stories that have the quality of “immediacy”: they happened very recently, or are about to happen. They also often affect readers’ lives in some way. For example, a story regarding a crime that occurred two days ago, or an article about a tax hike that has just been passed would be categorized as hard news (Rich, 2009, p. 17).

According to Sova (2002, p.23) the *inverted pyramid* is today’s dominant structure in hard news article writing (see appendix). This news writing style began in US newspapers near the end of the 19th century (Knight, 2010, p.21). In this framework, the key story information is positioned at the very beginning of the article. The body of the story contains supporting information, and the end of the story contains the least important information (Campbell, Fabos & Martin, 2012). A great advantage to this style of writing is that if a breaking news story necessitates the unexpected inclusion of a new article, a newspaper editor is free to cut the ends off articles that have already been slated to print in order to make space for it. In this way, a new article can be added without needing to completely omit others. They just become a bit shorter, without sacrificing any of the most important facts (Knight, 2010, p.22).

At the heart of the inverted pyramid article-writing structure is the *lead* - the beginning of the article. Although there is general agreement that the lead is the most important part of hard news articles, in that it contains the most important information of the story, there is some difference of opinion about exactly how a lead should be composed. *What are the elements of a lead?*

The Purdue OWL (2013) identifies the lead as the most important part of a news story, due to the current large number of sources of information, such as TV, radio, and magazines. It posits that readers will thus not read past the first paragraph of an article unless it is sufficiently interesting, with so many other choices available. It also

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specifies several tips for writing a solid lead, including:

A : The writer should decide which of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW are most important, and then focus on those in the first sentence.

B : Many good leads include some sort of conflict. It is asserted that this mirrors a truism about good stories, in that they also include conflict.

C : The lead should be specific, rather than broad.

D : Leads should be brief in order to hold reader interest. They should be one or two sentences long.

E : Leads should be 25-30 words long.

F : The lead must be honest: the story that follows the lead must deliver what the lead promises, as a lead is a sort of promise to the reader.

G : Redundancy should be avoided. For example, “2 p.m. Wednesday afternoon”. Clutter should also be avoided.

H : Leads should not start with the word “it”, as it is imprecise.

I : Two main types of leads are *summary leads* and *anecdotal leads*.

Summary leads are often used for breaking news, and tend to provide answers to WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW.

Anecdotal leads start an article with a brief anecdote which illustrates the central point of the story. Other types of leads are used much more rarely (Arnold, Cook, Koyama, Angeli, & Paiz, 2013).

World Pulse, utilizing material provided by The Press Institute and The OpEd Project, states that all news stories have a very similar organizational structure. It advises prospective news writers to learn this structure in order to write more easily. It breaks an article into three parts: lead, body, and ending, all fitting within the inverted pyramid structure. Several tips are in reference to leads, including:

A : A lead should answer WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY.

B : A lead should be composed of clear writing.

C : It is important to include *attribution* in any lead. This is both because it enhances the credibility of the story, and it informs the reader of the source of the information.

D : *Buried leads* should be avoided. These are leads in which the point of the article is not actually mentioned in the lead, but rather the second paragraph or afterward. It is warned that buried leads leave readers unsure of what the story is about, and these types of leads should especially be avoided in hard news articles.

E : In hard news stories, summary leads are most often used. Other types of leads include:

Narrative: These are also called anecdotal leads. They should give readers a vivid sense of the action of a story.

Contrast: These leads inform the reader about how something has changed over time. Contrast leads can take several paragraphs to develop.

Staccato: These entice the reader by using short phrases in a dramatic way. The details revealed in the short phrases must then be fleshed out with details.

Question: As the name implies, these leads begin with a question. This question should be answered quickly in the article, rather than leaving the reader to speculate.

Quote: If a quote is used to begin a lead, it should be powerful and be something said by the central person in the article (World Pulse, 2009).

Jim Hall advises that a lead often states the theme of the article following it. He feels that this is particularly important because an article with a clear focus gives the reader a feeling of “completeness”, and that the writer is skilled. He has written a comprehensive guide to writing a lead, with tips such as:

A : The writer should think of the lead as a hook meant to lure the reader into delving deeper into the article. Thus, there should be no superfluous words.

B : Honesty is an essential component of any lead. It should not imply that the story that follows it is more startling or sensational than it truly is.

C : The writer should imagine that his or her friend has asked what the story is about, and the answer to this question should be a sentence that reveals the essence of the story. This is called the “tell-a-friend” technique.

D : The two most common types of leads are *direct leads* and *delayed leads*.

Direct leads summarize or state the most important events in the article. Interestingly, he refers to this as the “climax” of the article, which certainly fits the inverted pyramid framework. He notes that this is as if one is revealing the punch line of a joke before telling the joke itself. This type of lead should be one or two sentences long, and 25 words or less. This is the most common type of lead.

Delayed leads use an incident, anecdote or example. This is a tease to draw the reader into the story, and develop a feeling of foreboding or surprise. The most important information in the article is not included in this type of lead (Hall, 2001).

Sova (2002) has an interesting take on the summary lead. She breaks summary leads into six distinct types, and provides several examples (Sova, 2002, p.25-26). Based on these examples, a story regarding a new shopping mall in a town in Japan could be written in different ways, depending on the type of lead:

Summary Lead 1: Emphasis on “Who”

Residents of Ebimachi browsed the aisles of the Kitty Mall on Monday, as retailers opened their doors in anticipation of strong sales...

Summary Lead 2: Emphasis on “What”

The Kitty Mall has opened its doors to the public after three years of construction, protests, and debate focused on the increase in traffic...

Summary Lead 3: Emphasis on “When”

On Monday morning, the Kitty Mall opened its doors to crowds which numbered in the thousands, according to the Ebimachi Police Department...

Summary Lead 4: Emphasis on “Where”

In Ebimachi, after several years of construction, protests, and debate, the Kitty Mall opened its doors to the community on Monday morning...

Summary Lead 5: Emphasis on “Why”

As a result of the town council vote delaying the opening of the Kitty Mall until 2014, Ebimachi retailers finally opened their doors on Monday morning after several years of...

Summary Lead 6: Emphasis on “How”

With a ribbon cutting ceremony and a short speech by its manager, the Kitty Mall opened its doors Monday morning to crowds which numbered in the thousands...

So, in this view, a lead can begin with any of the six question words. To emphasize one of them, the writer can simply place it at the very beginning of the lead. The article can thus be given a different focus by simply formulating the lead differently. For example, the story following Summary Lead 1 might focus on the residents and their reaction to the new mall.

The text also advises that the writer consider how the focus of the article changes depending upon choices related to voice and emphasis. It suggests five questions the author should be able to answer:

1. How will readers react to the lead?
2. What have you promised readers? What should they expect in the rest of the article?
3. Where do you want the emphasis to lie in the article?
4. Where does the lead promise readers that the emphasis will lie?
5. Are the lead and the story structured to appeal to your readers? (Sova, 2002, p.27)

It is suggested that Question 5 is especially important to consider, as it relates to the market in which the article will appear. For instance, readers will be concerned with different matters if they are reading a national, local, or campus newspaper, and the lead should reflect this in order to attract its intended audience (Sova, 2002, p.27).

The media in the United States were relentlessly partisan for about a century after its founding. According to Brown (2011, p.285), more objective reporting began to take place after the Civil War, in part due to the creation of news organizations like the Associated Press. The AP is a cooperative, sharing news reportage among TV, radio, and newspaper outlets worldwide. AP stories are ubiquitous, found in global news sources of all types, sizes and political preferences, as they are in fact produced and shared by their approximately 1400 U.S. member

newspapers and thousands of member TV and radio outlets (Associated Press, 2014). They are representative of modern journalism across an incredibly broad spectrum of media. Thus, they make an excellent source of articles for lead analysis.

Analysis:

I reviewed fifty random AP leads from news stories published in 2014. They were analyzed according to various criteria suggested by the guidelines and tips summarized earlier in this paper. Which guidelines for writing a news lead accurately reflect current authentic hard news reporting, as written, compiled and distributed by the AP?

How many words are in the lead?

Mean: 46

Median: 40

Mode: both 39 and 42

<i>Sample Leads</i>	<i>Notes</i>
The Liberian government says it will receive doses of an experimental Ebola drug to treat doctors in the West African country. (No Author Cited, AP, 2014)	shortest (21 words)
Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew Saturday in a St. Louis suburb where police and protesters have clashed in the week since a black teenager was shot to death by a white police officer. (Duara & Lieb, AP, 2014)	median (close example, 41 words)

Does the lead begin with WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, or HOW?

<i>Question</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
WHO	37
WHAT	11
WHEN	2
WHERE	0
WHY	0
HOW	0

<i>Sample Leads</i>	<i>Notes</i>
A couple accused of kidnapping two young Amish sisters were prowling for easy targets and may have also planned to abduct other children, a sheriff said Saturday. Stephen Howells Jr. and Nicole Vaisey, both of Hermon, were arrested Friday on charges they snatched the 7-year-old and 12-year-old girls from a roadside farm stand in front of their home near the Canadian border. (No Author Cited, AP, 2014)	who
Sanctions aimed at key economic sectors in Russia because of its threatening moves in Ukraine might be delayed because of positive signals from Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to Obama administration officials. (Klapper, Lee & Pace, AP, 2014)	what
After Superstorm Sandy hit the East Coast nearly two years ago, the federal government quickly sent out \$1.4 billion in emergency disaster aid to the hurricane's victims. Now, thousands of people might have to pay back their share. (No Author Cited, AP, 2014)	when

Is the first word of the lead “it”?

Frequency: 1

<i>Lead</i>	<i>Notes</i>
It was a simple trick - punching in passcodes to listen to messages left on other people’s phones. For years the illegal technique, known as phone hacking, helped Britain’s News of the World tabloid get juicy stories about celebrities, politicians and royalty. (Lawless, AP, 2014)	first word is “it”

How many sentences per lead?

<i>Sentences</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1	34
2	11
3	4
4	0
5	1

The outlier, a five-sentence lead, is an anecdotal lead in which the central WHO information in the story is not revealed until the 5th sentence:

On a recent moonlit night, Border Patrol agents began rounding up eight immigrants hiding in and around a canal near the Rio Grande. A state trooper soon arrived to help. Then out of the darkness emerged seven more armed men in fatigues. Agents assumed the camouflaged crew that joined in pulling the immigrants from the canal’s milky green waters was a tactical unit from the Texas Department of Public Safety. Only later did they learn that the men belonged to the Texas Militia, a group that dresses like a SWAT team and carries weapons but has no law-enforcement training or authority of any kind. (Sherman, AP, 2014)

In addition, all four of the three sentence leads are anecdotal leads.

Various lead types

<i>Lead</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Summary	43
Anecdotal	5
Contrast	2
Staccato	0
Question	0
Quote	0

<i>Sample Leads</i>	<i>notes</i>
As a new temporary truce took hold, negotiators from Israel and the Hamas militant group resumed indirect talks Monday to reach a long-term cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. (Daraghmeh, AP, 2014)	summary
On the last day of school Gladys Chinoy memorized her mother's phone number in New York City and boarded a bus to Guatemala's northern border. With nothing but the clothes on her back, the 14-year-old took a truck-tire raft across the Naranjo River into Mexico and joined a group of five women and a dozen children waiting with one of the smugglers who are paid \$6,000 to \$7,000 for each migrant they take to the U.S. (Arce, AP, 2014)	anecdotal
Six times, President Barack Obama has come before the American people to reckon with the legacy of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the anniversary of that awful day. Each time, he has tailored his message to the moment, at different points stressing themes of service, resilience, tolerance, reconciliation. This year, with the threat of the Islamic State militant group looming, Obama's rhetoric of remembrance is circling back to earlier days and striking a less triumphant tone. (Benac, AP, 2014)	contrast

Readability Index: all 50 leads

<i>Type</i>	<i>Approx. U.S. grade level necessary for comprehension</i>
Coleman Liau index	12.02
Flesch Kincaid Grade level	13.92
ARI (Automated Readability Index)	14.08
SMOG	14.82

(Readability Calculator, 2014 & Warner, 2012)

Use of a list

Seven leads use a list as part of their structure.

<i>Sample Leads</i>	<i>notes</i>
A Russia in search of global vindication kicked off the Sochi Olympics looking more like a Russia that likes to party, with a pulse-raising opening ceremony about fun and sports instead of terrorism, gay rights and coddling despots . (Charlton & Vasilyeva, AP, 2014)	uses a list
An Android update, wearable gadgets and so-called smart home devices are just some of the innovations Google is likely to show off at its two-day developer conference, which begins Wednesday in San Francisco. (No Author Cited, AP, 2014)	uses a list

Here is a checklist for students for writing an authentic lead, based on both this analysis of current hard news article leads, and previous literature described earlier in the paper:

☐ A summary lead should usually be 1-2 sentences long.

☐ Anecdotal leads may be 1-3 sentences long, and rarely, longer.

☐ Your lead should be between 20-50 words long. Summary leads should be on the lower end of this estimate, anecdotal leads may be longer.

- ☐ Try to write clear, concise sentences.
- ☐ Anecdotal leads may withhold an important piece of information until the end of the lead.
- ☐ Your lead should provide answers to WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and often WHY. HOW may also be provided, but less frequently.
- ☐ Your lead should begin with WHO or WHAT. WHEN is also used, but much less frequently.
- ☐ Try to avoid starting your article with the word “it”, as it is only rarely done.
- ☐ Try to begin your story with a summary lead. Anecdotal leads and contrast leads are also used, but less frequently.
- ☐ Although you are still learning English, please try to push yourself to use higher level vocabulary and write longer sentences than you may be accustomed to writing. Authentic newspaper article leads are often written at a late high school/early college level of comprehension.
- ☐ You may use a list as a convenient way to provide a lot of information in a small amount of space.

Student work

As stated earlier in this paper, although there are several different types of leads, *summary leads* are used most often. They summarize the most important information of the story (World Pulse, 2009). There are several types of summary leads, including those with an emphasis on who, what, when, where, why, and how (Sova, 2002, p.25-26).

As part of a class assignment, I encouraged students to compile a “news file”, in which part of their written work was to create a paragraph with a summary lead which emphasized what they thought was the most important information contained in a news story that they had researched. They were specifically instructed not to paraphrase or copy the existing leads of the articles they had read, but rather to analyze the information, and then to create summary leads which most accurately reflected their own judgment about which elements of the stories were most important, and thus should be emphasized.

Based on the findings described in this paper and the following student work, what sort of feedback would be appropriate to encourage lead writing that is more authentically structured?

Sample Lead 1:

Now, there are 700 new exoplanets. But latest news says Kepler discovered a planet which have liquid water on its surface. This name is Kepler-186f.

Feedback:

This lead begins with a *when*. It would be better if it began with a *who*.

It can be consolidated into two sentences by including the name of the planet in the second sentence.

Sample Lead 2:

The report produced by WFP states WFP's school meal programme helps children to get calories and nutrition, and the programme also added incentive to come to class. But, the report notes that the programme is still lacking in many developing countries.

Feedback:

This lead is lacking *when* information. When was the WFP report released? Is it new? Without knowing this, the lead lacks *immediacy*.

Sample Lead 3:

Scientists find new dinosaur in Utah. The dinosaur called "Nasutoceratops" that means big nose face in Latin. Nasutoceratops is Triceratops related dinosaur, but different from Triceratops.

Feedback:

It's good that this lead begins with a *who*, but "scientists" is a bit general. Which institution are the scientists affiliated with, or which country are they from? For example, "Toyo University scientists have discovered...", or "Researchers at Toyo University have discovered..."

Sample Lead 4:

NASA's partner Orbital Sciences Corporation was successfully launched the new space vehicle Antares on April 21st. The Antares is a rocket that will carrying cargo and crews. Antares launch was scheduled to Friday (19th), but it was postponed because high winds.

Feedback:

Aside from minor grammatical issues, this is a well-constructed lead.

Sample Lead 5:

One hot-air balloon was hit the basket of another, and it was falling on the ground. This accident was caused by the crowded.

Feedback:

This lead is concise, but not quite clear. Revise so that the event described in the lead is more understandable.

Sample Lead 6:

Tokyo Governor hope to have a 24 hour bus service.

Feedback:

In the lead of a hard news story, we must stick to the facts. We cannot say that a person “hopes” for anything, because it’s impossible to know for sure what anyone is truly thinking. Rather, it is preferable to say that a person “says that he hopes” or to use a direct quotation. In addition, we need to add a second sentence that provides more information.

Sample Lead 7:

New handgun successfully fired in Texas, that made with 3D printer. The gun named the Liberator, that has 16 parts. One part of gun is metal, because the US law force that to find firearms in metal detectors.

Feedback:

Aside from minor grammatical issues, this is a well-constructed lead.

Sample Lead 8:

Starbucks Company will offer 135,000 United States employees to have college education for free from Arizona state university without requiring to remain with company after graduated. This program will take class online. It allows all employees who work at least 20 hours per week and pass the test to gain Arizona state.

Feedback:

The information in the third sentence could be included in the second sentence, in order to produce a two sentence lead. For example, “This online program allows all employees...”

Sample Lead 9:

After its has typhoon named Rammasun passed Philippines and China last week another huge storm is going to

hit Taiwan. Taiwan weather broadcast said typhoon matzo will hit Taiwan on Wednesday morning.

Feedback:

The language at the beginning of the lead needs to be cleaned up for greater clarity.

Sample Lead 10:

Recently, global warming is slower pace of temperature rises than 1980s and 1990s. In the time, global warming raise strong pace. The reason is emission of greenhouse gas growth in China.

Feedback:

This lead begins with a *when*. It would be better if it began with a *what*.

The information in the second sentence needs to be clarified.

Sample Lead 11:

Catherine was bear baby. The baby's sex is boy.

Feedback:

These sentences are far too short. A summary lead should be 20-50 words long. Push yourself to write longer sentences so that your lead provides more information to the reader.

Sample Lead 12:

There was the case that a boy was attacked by a dog. However, there was the cat called the Tara which protected the boy.

Feedback:

As a summary lead should begin with a *who* or a *what*, this lead would be improved if the first part of the sentence were deleted and it began with "A boy".

Sample Lead 13:

It is not the most appropriate source to get medical information, the new report suggests Wikipedia. According to the health expert, they found that 90% Wikipedia entry contains false information.

Feedback:

Try to avoid starting your lead with the word "it", as it is only rarely done.

It is good that attribution is included in the second sentence, but “health expert” is too general. Please identify the source.

Sample Lead 14:

Disney produce the new ice cream! In National ice cream month. It’s handmade ice cream sandwich.

Feedback:

It is not appropriate to use an exclamation point in your lead.

The lead can be consolidated into one sentence by adding the information in the second and third sentences to the first sentence.

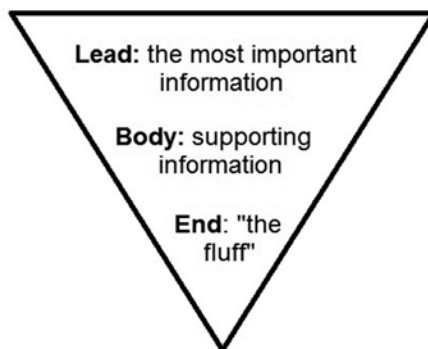
Sample Lead 15:

On Tuesday, Google announced a partnership with Novartis in Europe for the development of contact lenses that could monitor blood glucose levels of wearer.

Feedback:

This lead begins with a *when*. It would be better if it began with a *what*.

Appendix



The Inverted Pyramid: structure of modern hard news articles

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【Abstract】

ESL学生のための報道記事前文の分析

マイケル・シュルマン*

学生にとって「国際化」が広く望ましいとされる時代の到来と共に、国際的な問題や政治に焦点を当てた報道記事の読み方や執筆方法を学生に教えることについての関心が高まっている。

前文は報道記事の心臓部であり、今日の逆三角形型の記事執筆構造の重要な要素となっている。

本論では前文の執筆方法についての様々なアドバイスを記述し、実際の AP 通信の記事から抜粋した 50 の前文と、このアドバイスの中で最も一般的な要素を比較した。

学生と報道記事執筆方法に取り組む ESL/EFL 教師に有用ないくつかの短い規則と結果をまとめたものである。

キーワード：報道記事前文、ESL / EFL、国際化、ハードニュース、新聞記事執筆

With the advent of an age in which the “internationalization” of our students is widely seen as desirable, there has been an increased interest in teaching them how to read and write news stories about international events. At the heart of every authentic news article is a lead; it is the key component of today’s inverted pyramid-based news writing structure. This paper describes how various sources advise writing a lead, compares the most common elements of this advice to fifty leads taken from authentic AP news articles, and then summarizes the results with a few short rules which may be of use to ESL/EFL teachers teaching news article writing.

Keywords: news leads, ESL/EFL, globalization, hard news, newspaper writing

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